

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9708

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPNEHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION US NEW YORK

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 0468

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, BE, US

SUBJECT: VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT CRISIS

REF: BRUSSELS 393

1. SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR REVIEWED BELGIAN POLITICAL
SCENE THIS WEEK WITH DEFENSE MINISTER PAUL
VANDEN BOEYNANTS, A LEADING PERSONALITY IN THE
SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (PSC) AND FORMER
PRIME MINISTER (1966-68), AND WITH CHARLES
FERDINAND NOTHOMB, PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN
PARTY. BOTH OF THESE LEADERS EXPECT EARLY ELECTIONS,
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OPPOSE ANY EFFORT TO TAKE ACTIONS IN THE CURRENT

PARLIAMENT TO EMPOWER THE NEXT PARLIAMENT TO ENACT
NEW CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, AND CLAIM TO FORE-
SEE NO NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF US INTERESTS AS
RESULT OF ANY CONCEIVABLE ELECTORAL OUTCOME.
END SUMMARY

2. AT HIS BREAKFAST MEETING WITH DEFENSE MINISTER
VANDEN BOEYNANTS JANUARY 24, DEVOTED PRINCIPALLY TO
DISCUSSION OF THE F-104 REPLACEMENT REQUIREMENT,
REPORTED SEPARATELY, AMBASSADOR STRAUSS-HUPE ASKED
VANDEN BOEYNANTS FOR HIS VIEWS ON THE CURRENT
GOVERNMENT CRISIS. VANDEN BOEYNANTS, POPULARLY
KNOWN IN BELGIUM AS QTE VDB UNQTE, SAID HE FOUND
THE CRISIS QTE IDIOTIC UNQTE. IT IS A
QTE POLITICIANS' CRISIS UNQTE. IT IS NOT A
NATIONAL CRISIS REFLECTING ANY DEGREE OF POPULAR
ANXIETY OR DESIRE TO SEE NEW ELECTIONS HELD. AN
ESSENTIALLY IDENTICAL VIEW WAS EXPRESSED TO THE
AMBASSADOR BY CHARLES FERDINAND NOTHOMB, PSC
PRESIDENT, ON JANUARY 23.

3. MINORITY GOVERNMENT VS EARLY ELECTIONS. NEITHER
VDB NOR NOTHOMB FAVOR AN ATTEMPT TO FORM A MINORITY
GOVERNMENT. NOTHOMB THOUGHT ELECTIONS MIGHT BE
HELD IN EARLY MARCH.

4. CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ISSUE. NEITHER VDB NOR
NOTHOMB FAVOR ACTION TO GIVE THE NEXT PARLIAMENT
AUTHORITY TO ENACT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS.
AMENDMENTS ARE NOT DEEDED TO IMPLEMENT A NATIONALLY
ACCEPTABLE REGIONALIZATION, SAID THE DEFENCE
MINISTER. MAKING NEW AMENDMENTS POSSIBLE WOULD
ONLY OPEN THE WAY FOR IMPRACTICAL PROPOSALS FROM
EXTREMISTS.

5. ELECTORAL OUTCOME. VDB ANTICIPATES THAT ELECTIONS
WOULD LEAD TO A VERY MINOR REAPPORTIONMENT OF SEATS
IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, QTE ONLY ABOUT FOUR
SEATS UNQTE. HE EXPECTS THE SOCIALISTS WOULD LOSE
VOTES IN FLANDERS AND IN BRUSSELS BUT NOT IN
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WALLONIA. HE SEES THE LIBERAL PARTIES (PLP/PVV)
BADLY SPLIT, AND LIKELY TO BE OF DIMINISHED IMPOR-
TANCE IN THE FORMATION OF A FUTURE COALITION
GOVERNMENT. NOTHOMB SEES THE CRISIS CHIEFLY
SIGNIFICANT AS REFLECTING CONTROL OF THE PSB BY
ITS MORE MILITANT ELEMENTS. THIS DEVELOPMENT
MIGHT MAKE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FUTURE PSC/PSB
COALITION GOVERNMENT MORE DIFFICULT, BUT NEVERTHELESS

NOTHOMB THINKS SUCH A COALITION IS THE ONLY CONCEIVABLE OUTCOME OF A NEW ELECTION.

6. FEDERALIST/LINGUISTIC PARTIES. VDB WAS VEHEMENT IN REJECTING THE IDEA OF BRINGING ANY OF THE LANGUAGE GROUPS (FDF/RW VOLKSUNIE) INTO A FUTURE GOVERNMENT. THE GOB SHOULD QTE BURY REGIONALIZATION UNQTE BY GETTING ON WITH ITS PROPER IMPLEMENTATION.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF US INTERESTS. VDB AND NOTHOMB CLAIMED TO FORESEE NO NEGATIVE IMPLICATION FOR THE BELGIAN POSITION TOWARDS NATO, THE EC, OR THE US RESULTING FROM ANY CONCEIVABLE ELECTORAL RESULT.

8. EMBASSY COMMENT: VANDEN BOEYNANTS SEES HIMSELF AS REMAINING IN ONE OR ANOTHER KEY POSITION IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT, AS REPORTED IN BRUSSELS 0457. WE ARE INCLINED TO THINK HIS SELF CONFIDENCE IS JUSTIFIED. LEBURTON'S MALADROIT ADMINISTRATION HAS ADDED LUSTER IN RETROSPECT TO VANDEN BOEYNANTS' REPUTATION FOR EFFICIENCY. NOTHOMB'S VIEWS ARE WORTH HANING BECUASE OF HIS POSITION AS PRESIDENT OF THE PSC, BUT THE ONLY SPECULATION WE HAVE HEARD ABOUT HIS POLITICAL FUTURE IS THAT HE IS UNLIKELY TO PROSPER. THE COMMENTS OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS AND NOTHOMB MAY BE TAKEN AS AUTHORITATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF THE PSC VIEW OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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